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Bad reporting hurts the First Amendment

"The pen is mightier than the sword." I believe it. But there seems to be little defense against the publishing of half-truths, inaccurate or misreported accounts of events and wrong or (even worse) contrived quotations. Are the reporters or commentators dishonest? Are they ignorant? Or, are they just guilty of sloppy research?

There was a time in my life when I trusted the press. But then I read a so-called expose in *Readers Digest* on a subject about which I knew the details. The writer had reported a series of incidents that appeared to be scandalous but he had either left out, or chose not to report, the other side of the story which explained why the incidents had occurred and that the incidents were strictly honest, fair and legal.

And back in 1975 I was in Guam and passed by the two-story wooden barracks where boat people were being housed quite comfortably. When I got back to Maryland I saw a CBS News show which included an item about the boat people. The film clip used by CBS showed food lines in front of a refugee tent-city. CBS probably didn't know that the tent-city was a very short phase and that the boat people were getting good care. CBS probably had some flunky in the film room pull a tape off the shelves and never considered that it was history, not news.

Or, how about the AP feature in *The News-Post* about water buffalo meat. The accompanying wire photo showed American bison, not water buffalo. Again, I'll bet some ignorant AP staff gopher, or maybe not ignorant, was sent to the photo files to get a picture of a buffalo. Or

maybe they didn't hear the word "water." Or maybe the reporter didn't know the difference between the two animals.

Finally, a federal appellate court in New York recently said it was OK to make up quotations as part of freedom of speech.

What am I getting at? I'm trying to explain why there exists a constant need to review the output of the media in general and local journalists, such as Roy Meachum, in particular. I don't believe that they have the time, the inclination or the incentive to get the facts straight.

Remember, the media (except for public radio and television) are in the business of selling advertisements but they hide behind the First Amendment like some divine right. And truth and accuracy suffer due to it. If Roy can't get the facts straight when he writes about things I know about, why should I accept his facts concerning subjects foreign to me?

And if he or any other journalist is hurt by these or other comments, he has no one to blame but himself. In my opinion, bad reporting does as much violence to the First Amendment as does censorship.

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